



Congressman

SHERROD BROWN

WORKING FOR YOU

Winter 2005

## More Flawed Trade Agreements Expected in the New Year

For the first half of 2005, an overwhelming majority of Democrats and Republicans joined forces to fight the flawed Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA).

We built a strong bipartisan coalition that included labor, manufacturers, environmental groups, religious organizations, public interest groups, farmers, ranchers, and human rights groups.

Because CAFTA was so unpopular with the American public, the vote took place in the middle of the night, after the nation had gone to sleep. Had the vote been closed at the end of the standard 15 minutes, CAFTA would have been defeated 180-175. However, the vote was held open for nearly an hour while the Vice President, U.S. Secretary of Commerce, and U.S. Trade Representative each held private meetings with members just outside the House chamber.

In the end, two Republican members of Congress switched their votes and gave the White House a trade agreement that no one wanted. Had members been allowed to vote their conscience, CAFTA would have failed.

It's been four months since Congress voted on CAFTA, and more bad trade agreements are on the way. The next attempt to exploit foreign workers and U.S. jobs will be through the Andean Free Trade Agreement (AFTA).

Thanks to the strong coalition formed during the



Congressman Brown leads the fight against flawed trade policies at a Capitol Hill news conference.

CAFTA debate, AFTA faces an even tougher, uphill battle. In late 2005, negotiations with several AFTA nations and the U.S. fell apart, and the agreement is currently stalled. Without enforceable labor and environmental standards AFTA will face the same coordinated opposition, as did CAFTA.

AFTA is just more of the same. More failed policies that will sell out American working families and ship U.S. jobs overseas. More failed policies that will exploit poor workers in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru.

More failed policies that could increase cocaine production from the region. And more failed policies that will harm America's manufacturers and family farmers.

After the CAFTA fight, more Americans will question why our nation continues to trade away good-paying jobs and long-term economic stability with virtually nothing but a growing trade deficit to show for it.

The Administration's trade and economic policies have devastated Ohio. Since 2001, Ohio has lost more than 200,000 manufacturing jobs—one in six.

If we learned anything from the CAFTA battle, it was that the American public, and the truth were on our side.

If the United States is serious about creating robust export markets for American goods, it should be promoting fair wages and safe working conditions in the developing world. It should reward U.S. businesses that produce domestically and keep good paying jobs here at home. It should stop the corporate welfare that encourages U.S. companies to incorporate overseas, taking our jobs with them.

Exploiting poor workers only leads to increased poverty and smaller markets. If trade agreements would raise living standards globally, the United States would vastly increase the export capacity and prosperity of U.S. companies. And that means more jobs here at home.

It is time for a new trade policy—one that helps American businesses prosper and helps workers in developing nations earn a living wage.

When the world's poorest workers can buy American products, rather than make them, and American jobs are not shipped overseas, then we will know that our trade policies are finally succeeding.

### Claim the Earned Income Tax Credit

Working Ohioans should keep the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) in mind as they prepare to file their 2005 federal income tax returns. The EITC rewards work with a tax benefit of up to \$4,400, and workers with incomes up to approximately \$37,000 can qualify. To learn more about how to apply or to estimate your EITC, visit [www.house.gov/sherrodbrown](http://www.house.gov/sherrodbrown).

See recent updates on my Website at:

[www.house.gov/sherrodbrown](http://www.house.gov/sherrodbrown)

## What You Should Know About the Avian Flu

With news coming in from overseas about bird flu, we are working to put in place all the necessary precautions to prevent the virus from reaching American soil.

Importantly, bird flu is not the annual flu virus. The bird flu virus has only been found overseas in poultry and a few individuals who have had close contact with those animals. This gives us a vital opportunity to contain the virus as it is, and to prepare in case the virus does become more dangerous for people.

In November, the House Energy and Commerce Committee held a hearing on the Bush Administration's long-awaited national pandemic preparedness plan.



The President has not yet secured adequate funding for this plan. As the senior Democrat on the Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee, I am working with my colleagues to make sure our nation proactively addresses this threat.

A critical tool in pandemic preparedness is an adequate supply of vaccine and antiviral medicines.

I introduced the Public Health Emergency Medicines Act, which would allow federal authorities to more easily and quickly secure generic versions of anti-flu drugs in a public health crisis.

For more information about pandemic flu and to learn what steps you can take to prepare, please visit:

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov>.



Congressman Brown joined U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy, and others, in calling for a raise in the federal minimum wage.

### USO Drop-Off Sites

Congressman Brown's district offices in Lorain and Akron have been designated by the USO as drop-off locations for the USO Care Package Program.



The Care Package program is one of the USO's most important projects. USO volunteers collect, sort and pack donated items to send to the troops overseas. These items include non-perishable foods, personal hygiene supplies, books, international phone cards, disposable cameras and travel-size games.

### Medicare "Part D" Concerns

If you are a Medicare enrollee or have family or friends in the Medicare program, you may be familiar with "Medicare Part D," the new Medicare drug coverage program. Under this optional program, retired and disabled Americans who opt for drug coverage must choose between competing drug plans offered by private insurers. The enrollment period began on November 15, 2005 and lasts until May 15, 2006. Medicaid enrollees will lose their Medicaid drug coverage on December 31, 2005, and will be automatically enrolled in a private drug plan.

I opposed this untested drug coverage scheme. Unfortunately, Congress was not permitted a vote on an alternate proposal I helped author that would have enabled Medicare enrollees to simply add drug benefits to their existing Medicare coverage.

Not surprisingly, the new privatized drug program is off to a rocky start. Medicare enrollees are understandably confused and frustrated by the bewildering number of private plans, each with its own drug list, cost sharing requirements, and pharmacy network. In Ohio alone, more than 40 drug plans are being marketed to Medicare enrollees.

I have urged leaders of both the House and Senate to allow a vote on legislation that would help repair the damage. Modeled on the alternative drug proposal, the Prescription Drug Savings and Choice Act would allow Medicare beneficiaries to bypass the private insurance market and add drug benefits directly to Medicare. The federal government would negotiate volume discounts on covered prescription drugs, saving money for both Medicare enrollees and U.S. tax-

payers.

Regardless of whether Congress ultimately passes legislation to replace or improve the new drug coverage program, it is important for Medicare enrollees who lack drug coverage to carefully consider enrolling in this program. Individuals with high drug costs can benefit from the new coverage, and even those with low drug spending may be better off enrolling now because premium penalties may be levied on late enrollees. The Ohio Senior Health Insurance Information Program (toll-free, (800) 686-1578) can help Ohio seniors make this decision and compare the available plans.

Additional information and resources are listed on my Web site: <http://www.house.gov/sherrod/brown/issu eshealthmedicarepartd.htm>



## Standing Up for Manufacturers

I have long supported the U.S. Commerce Department's Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) program, and I was proud to take a stand for MEP again this year.

MEP helps small manufacturing businesses improve their efficiency, increase their competitiveness, and stay in business. MEP has a proven track record of success in Ohio, and Ohio's MEP centers are among the best in the nation. When well-funded, MEP helped more than 2,700 Ohio businesses create or retain more than 1,100 jobs, increase sales by almost \$20 million, cut costs by more than \$47 million, and

increase investments by \$58 million.

Despite that track record of success, the current Administration has repeatedly put MEP on the chop-

ping block. The President's 2006 budget sought a 56% cut in MEP funding.

I was pleased to work with more than 200 colleagues on both sides of the aisle to defend MEP. The final Commerce Department spending bill rejects the 56% budget cut.

For more information about MEP and examples of its impact in Ohio, visit the Commerce Department's MEP Web site: [www.mep-nist.gov](http://www.mep-nist.gov).

## Fighting for Ohio Veterans

Every American is indebted to our troops for the sacrifices they make for our country. Unfortunately, veterans with service-connected disabilities are being short-changed by an inadequate transportation benefit that is failing to meet its intended purpose.

Currently, veterans seeking care for a service-connected condition are eligible for travel reimbursement. However, an eligible veteran must make three round-trip visits to the doctor in a month before they can receive any reimbursement.

### Energy Policy Running on Empty

This summer, the White House and Congressional Republicans reacted to rising gasoline prices by enacting an energy bill that did little or nothing to reduce gas prices or improve America's energy independence. This fall, following in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Congress passed an energy bill that failed to address America's dependency on foreign oil.

I again offered my Gasoline Availability Stabilization Reserves legislation, which would create an emergency gasoline supply to provide a cushion against price spikes when refineries or pipelines fail. European nations protect their consumers by maintaining similar reserves. As a result, we have been borrowing gasoline from France, Germany, Spain and other nations since Hurricane Katrina disrupted our supply. This common-sense plan to protect American consumers was rejected.

The energy bill also responds to a track record of anti-consumer behavior by big oil companies.

The bill unjustifiably shortcuts environmental reviews and allows your tax dollars to subsidize the highly profitable energy industry. It also rejects proposals I backed to relieve demand pressure on gasoline and natural gas prices by improving energy efficiency and diversifying our energy supply.

To learn more about energy issues, visit my Web site: [www.house.gov/sherrod.brown](http://www.house.gov/sherrod.brown).

I introduced legislation in September that would more fairly compensate health-related costs incurred by America's veterans. Endorsed by the Paralyzed Veterans of America, the Veterans Access to Health Care Act would make common sense improvements to the travel expense benefit veterans have earned.

It would eliminate the unjustifiable three-trip deductible so that veterans would be reimbursed for their first trip to the hospital or doctor. It would also raise reimbursement rates from 11 cents per mile to the same rate offered members of Congress for official travel by car, which is 48 cents per mile, or more than four times what a veteran currently receives.

This legislation honors our commitment to our troops, and I am proud to be its author.



Congressman Brown discusses issues important to veterans with Commander Earl Krueger of VFW Post 3345 in Strongsville.

**For updates and information about my work in Congress or to share your views on issues important to you, please visit [www.house.gov/sherrod.brown/optin.htm](http://www.house.gov/sherrod.brown/optin.htm)**



## Resolution of Inquiry Calls for Answers on Pre-War Intelligence

Seven months before the invasion of Iraq, which I opposed, a White House task force was organized in order to inform and educate Congress and the nation about alleged threats from Iraq—most notably the possibility of weapons of mass destruction, or WMDs.

The White House Iraq Group (WHIG)—made up of high-level White House officials—embarked on an information and media campaign to build support for the war. Congress—and the United States—was led to believe, among other things, that Iraq was buying uranium from Niger and aluminum tubes from China as part of a uranium enrichment program, which could have led to Iraqi nuclear weapons. These claims proved to be untrue.

Information provided to the American public, and to members of the United Nations, as we all now know, was at best faulty. In the aftermath of serious gaps in U.S. intelligence, it is the responsibility of Congress, as elected representatives of the people, to learn the facts surrounding this important issue, and to make that information public.

I have cosponsored legislation—H.R. 505—which would require the President and the Secretary of State to transfer all documents, e-mails, and communications relating to the White House Iraq Group to the U.S. House of Representatives.

Now is the time for review and accountability to ensure that when we send our men and women into battle, we do so as a fully-informed nation empowered with the truth.

# Student Aid Funding Cut

Last month, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to cut \$14.3 billion from federal student financial aid programs—the largest cut in the history of the programs.

This bill will add up to \$5,800 to the typical student borrower's college loan payments.

These costs will come in the form of additional charges on loan consolidation, higher interest rates, and increased taxes on loan payments.

With more than 300,000 borrowers, Ohio ranks 6th in the number of students who could be harmed by this cut. In total, Ohio student loan borrowers could pay more than \$780 million in additional interest costs over five years.

In the past decade, tuition in Ohio has risen 36 percent.

At the same time, student loans have replaced grants as the primary source of federal student financial aid. Thirty years ago, scholarships comprised about three-quarters of total federal student aid, while loans comprised about 20 percent.

This ratio has been reversed. Today the typical graduate has nearly \$20,000 in student loan debt, and 40 percent of graduates have unmanageable student loan burdens.

American students and families need more affordable college opportunities. We need to significantly enhance these opportunities to restore and strengthen American economic competitiveness.

Recent cuts in financial aid will deny millions of working families the ability to send their children to college.

I opposed these cuts and will work with my colleagues to support programs that ensure that higher education is affordable and accessible.

Students should not be required to mortgage their future to receive a college education.

## Small Business Loan Program Cut

One of the SBA's most popular loan programs for small businesses is known as 7(a). These versatile loans can be used to help cover initial start-up fees, facilitate business expansion, purchase inventory, or rehabilitate property. In 2004, more than \$12.4 billion was provided through this program to small businesses. Unfortunately, the Republican leadership has eliminated funding for the program and increased the fees borrowers and lenders pay. Instead of helping small businesses, this places an additional burden on them.

Despite bipartisan efforts to restore funding for the 7(a) loan program, including a letter to House and Senate leaders that I signed with 81 of my colleagues, no funding was provided for 2006. I will continue to fight along side my colleagues to provide our nation's small businesses the necessary resources to compete.

## Useful Phone Numbers

### Internal Revenue Services

National Toll-Free:  
(800) 829-1040

### Medicare

Toll-Free: 1-800-633-4227;  
TTY 1-877-486-2048

Ohio Agency on Aging:  
Cleveland Area (serving Cuyahoga,  
Lorain, Medina counties):  
(216) 621-8010

Akron Area (serving Summit County):  
(330) 896-9172

### Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA)

VA Benefits:  
(800) 827-1000

Veterans Health Care:  
(877) 222-8387

Brecksville VA Medical Center:  
(440) 526-3030

Wade Park VA Medical Center:  
(216) 791-3800

### Ohio Consumer Council (Utility Advocate for Consumers)

Toll-Free:  
(800)282-9448

### The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio

Toll-Free:  
1-800-686-PUCO (7826);  
TTY-TDD 800-686-1570.

### Social Security Administration

Toll-Free:  
800-772-1213;  
TTY 1-800-325-0778

Congressman  
**SHERROD BROWN**  
*Here to Serve You*

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205 W. 20th Street  
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(440) 245-5350  
(440) 245-5355 fax

#### Summit County

1655 W. Market Street  
Suite 435  
Akron, Ohio 44313  
(330) 865-8450  
(330) 865-8470 fax

#### Washington, D.C.

2332 Rayburn H.O.B.  
Washington, DC 20515  
(202) 225-3401  
(202) 225-2266 fax

**Web Page:** [www.house.gov/sherrodbrown](http://www.house.gov/sherrodbrown)

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